

## Reading Beyond the Classroom

*A community mobile library engages adults and children in reading for enjoyment.*

Bosco Nshimiyimana's 4 year old daughter Laissa Ufitinema gets reading help from library management committee member Niragire Elisabeth.



Bosco Nshimiyimana is an agronomist. He hires five employees to farm his two hectares of land, which is fertilized organically from his cows. "When I plant the seeds and forget to put the manure, it's like I have not planted," he says. "A person who does not read is like this—a field left untilled."

This was the theme of the official opening of Gicumbi district's first community library. Containing 1,200 storybooks, anthologies, novels, and traditional Rwandan stories in English and the native Kinyarwanda, the library will be shared by a number of neighboring rural communities. In Gicumbi, Bosco leads a committee of 14 community volunteers in managing the library and in encouraging children and community members to visit and borrow books. At least 80 libraries like this one will be established across the country by L3's Community Mobile Library Project.

Before the library came to Gicumbi, the community had understood the importance and value of reading but faced significant challenges. "If homes had any reading materials," Bosco says, "maybe they had Bibles or books of songs." Children's experience of reading was confined to textbooks at school, and children hardly ever saw parents or community members reading for enjoyment.

By providing a variety of quality, engaging reading materials, the library aims for parents, teachers, older siblings, and others in the community to model and encourage the habit of reading for young children. "Since the library is run by the community," says library volunteer Niragire Elisabeth, "it shows that reading isn't only for school."

Bosco has already seen the impact on his four-year-old daughter Laissa, who is in nursery school. "When I come to the library, she wants to come with me and take a book," he says. "She likes it a lot!"

Laissa isn't the only one. On the library's busiest days, groups of children will line up outside the crowded library, eager to get in to read and to have the adults explain their favorite stories. "When they see me reading," says library volunteer Leocadie Nyirabihinda, "they are also encouraged to read."

Children also see the value of reading for themselves, and now, for the first time, they have the opportunity to read books other than the textbooks in schools. On her first visit to the library,

primary 2 student Divine Uwimana said she would like to read these books with her older siblings. When asked why, she remarked, "when you read, you know everything."